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READING ALOUD:
PREPARING YOUNG CHILDREN FOR SCHOOL

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education: Reading Option

by
Melissa Erickson


June 1998

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Approved by:


Mr. Joseph W. Gray, Chair, Reading

6/10/98
Date


Mr. James Long, Resource Specialist
E. Neal Roberts Elementary School

ABSTRACT

With all the advancements of modern technology, television, computers, and developmental psychology, an increasing number of children are entering kindergarten unprepared. Children seem to lack opportunities to build background experiences and talk about the world with an adult. Parents do not need higher education or money to help their young children be academically prepared for school.

One of the most important activities parents can do, is to read to their young children and share the world with them through literature. Early experiences with books give children: language, experiences, vocabulary, and other skills that prepare them for formal reading experiences as they begin school. This background knowledge and experience helps them as they are asked to identify letters, sounds, and concepts.

It is important for parents to spend time reading aloud to their children. When they read from a wide variety of books with everyday vocabulary and experiences, children begin to understand the world around them even if they can not see it for themselves. The more children have experienced before entering kindergarten, the easier it is for them to grasp prereading concepts. They have more to draw on from their background experiences to help them

make sense of reading. This is because they have seen how language works naturally in reading, writing, listening, and speaking experiences.

Reading aloud to children is highly effective especially with at risk children. These children may not have had as many background experiences as others. When young children are given the chance to talk and share literature with an adult, many seem to increase their reading strategies and abilities quickly.

This project is divided into two sections, one for teachers and one for parents. Part one has a few simple brochures for teachers of young children to help them explain the importance of reading aloud to the parents of the children in their classrooms. Part two has a set of eight brochures to give parents ideas and activities to help develop and extend preschool skills.

The benefits of reading aloud to young children extend far beyond the acquisition of academic skills. Reading aloud increases their oral language, vocabulary, and experiences. As parents spend time reading with their children, they develop a closeness because they have shared a piece of life together. It prepares them for the skills they will be introduced to as they begin to read, and they will enter school ready to learn.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Numerous studies by Anderson (1985), Chomsky (1972), Snow and Ninto (1986) have documented the importance of reading books to preschool age children to enhance literacy development. Reading to preschool children is a critical determining factor of subsequent school literacy. It promotes the growth and understanding of vocabulary, and enhances the learning of basic concepts about books and literature.

The start of elementary school is in many ways, the beginning of a child's adult career. What happens during the preschool years lays a foundation for all that follows. Having children enter kindergarten ready to learn is advantageous not only to the parent but also the school. Formal education can be a time of wonder, exploration, and rapid growth if a child is ready to learn. Thus the preschool experiences are vital to a strong educational foundation.

The California State Department of Education document, *It's Elementary*, 1992, they state that today's children bring a wide range of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds to kindergarten. Children from over 80 different language groups who are learning English as a new language comprise up to thirty percent of children entering school and one out of six students were born in another

country. Some children are coming to school healthier and wealthier than ever before and have had preschool experiences in established preschools; however, the vast majority of California's children have not had any preschool experiences (p. xii). A critical issue facing public schools is, how schools assimilate children from widely different economic and cultural backgrounds and with limited preschool experiences into the educational main-stream.

Educational researchers have proven that one of the most important activities parents can do to increase the probability that their child will succeed in school is sharing literature together, reading aloud. For decades research has indicated that the family has a powerful impact on the education of children.

The United States Department of Education (1989) conducted a survey to determine how many parents read to their preschool aged children. The study determined that 64 percent of three to five year old children had parents who read to them or told them stories in a regular basis. This percentage is somewhat lower for Afro-American parents (56 percent), Hispanic (53 percent), and Asian (66 percent). In addition children from single parent families, and those whose mothers did not complete high school, were less likely to be read to, or told stories, several times a week.

In 1992, the National Governors' Association, in conjunction

with the U.S. Department of Education, established national educational goals for the year 2000. One of these goals stated that "by the year 2000, all American children will enter school ready to learn" (Robinson & Lyon 1994, p. 775). Although the general public also believes that it is important for children to be ready to learn when they enter kindergarten, the vast majority of children entering school are unprepared for academic tasks.

Most preschool-age children cannot read, in the conventional sense, when they enter Kindergarten. However, if modeling is provided, their attempts at reading show steady development during ages 3-5. (Hiebert, 1988). Researchers have studied the concept of emergent literacy, and they have found that reading, writing, and oral language develop concurrently and inter-relatedly in literate environments (Sulzby & Teal, 1997). Empirical research has documented that there is a strong relationship between early childhood literacy experiences and subsequent reading acquisition. "Contemporary perspective stresses that developmental literacy learning occurs during the first years of a child's life" (Mason & Allen, 1986, p. 2). Parents should begin early to introduce their children to a wide variety of schema building experiences and informal learning situations. McGee & Lomaz (1990) believe that these early literacy experiences are "crucial to literacy

acquisition" (p. 2). This statement supports the importance of early learning in the home.

Kindergarten children begin school with diverse experiences and understandings of print: what it is, how it works, and why it is used. These experiences and perspectives help develop their general literacy-related knowledge, as well as specific print skills and oral language competencies (Dickinson & Tabors, 1991; Mason & Allen, 1986). Children's exposure to written language (i.e., storybook reading by parents) during their preschool years develops an awareness of print, letter naming, and phonemic awareness. Children also, through exposure to oral language in books, begin to develop listening, comprehension, vocabulary, and language skills and strategies. This initial understanding about print is vitally important for all children, because those who are lacking literacy experiences upon entering school become "at risk" for failure in subsequent years.

In the past 20 years there have been many pendulum swings between the various theories of education and literacy which would dictate instruction, specifically in Kindergarten. For most children, Kindergarten is the beginning of formal schooling. The main goals of Kindergarten, for many years, were the development of social and pre-literary skills. Today's societal expectations have shifted to a

more structured, academic based curriculum. Many of the new required academic skills in Kindergarten are difficult to achieve if children enter Kindergarten without being exposed to reading activities at home. Reading aloud to children before they enter school emerges as a key component in facilitating early literacy acquisition (Heibert, 1988).

Parents can increase their child's success in literacy acquisition before they enter Kindergarten if they read aloud to their children everyday. Through reading aloud, Button, Johnson, and Furgerson (1996) believe that children are provided with an adult model, are motivated to read, begin developing a sense of story and knowledge of written language, increase vocabulary, and enjoy and share knowledge; thus creating a community of readers (p. 448), and facilitating success in literacy acquisition.

Reading aloud can benefit children at all grade levels and reading abilities. This project addresses the need for kindergarten teachers to encourage parents to read aloud with their children every day.

Theoretical Foundations

Children can learn reading strategies from their parents and siblings as well as from their teachers. Many parents wait until their child enters kindergarten before they begin formally working with them on reading activities. They try to find the right teacher with the right reading program for their child. There are many different theories on the acquisition of reading. When describing formal reading instruction, educational researchers use three major models: decoding skills, skills based, and whole language.

The decoding model strongly emphasizes phonic awareness. Reading instruction is centered on sounds or phonemes. Most instruction time is spent learning the relationships between letters and sounds and “sounding out letters in isolation.” In this model finding the meaning of a piece of literature is not emphasized. Sounding words out is the focus of this model. Reading aloud can give children a model of how letters and sounds create words, however, the meaning of the story is secondary to decoding.

The skills model emphasizes memorization of sight words, lots of drill-and-skill, and controlled vocabulary. This model utilizes, to a great extent, basal readers that have predetermined sequences for introducing vocabulary and skills. This is accomplished by the use of leveled basal readers, workbooks, and

skill sheets. Many teachers and parents were taught to read in the skills model. Reading aloud to children exposes them to vocabulary and words beyond their current capabilities. The more children experience through literature, the more prepared they are when asked to read on their own.

The whole language model emphasizes the “meaning” of a piece of literature. The major focus is primarily concerned with the entire text. While it does not place emphasis on the teaching of phonics, this model never excludes the learning of letter sounds and words. In this model the syntax, grapheme/phoneme, context, and cueing systems are used, in supporting the meaning of the text.

Reading aloud to children is one of the strategies emphasized in the whole language model. Robert and Marlene McCracken (1987) believe “the child’s brain seems intuitively ready to solve the mysteries of language if we begin with meaningful wholes, the whole of language and the whole of meaning” (p. 13). Reading aloud helps children hear an entire piece of literature and gain meaning from the reading. The decoding and skills models focus on parts of words, sentences, and phrases. When reading aloud, the focus is on the entire piece of literature. As Clay (1991) did some longitudinal monitoring, she found that as children learn many different strategies to understand print, they begin to understand the

concepts of letters, sounds, and word analysis (p. 325, 326). As parents read to their children, they tend to help them focus on the meaning of the story and develop an enjoyment of literature. During this process, the children naturally see how language works while becoming involved with the characters, plot, and the underlying message in books.

Literacy learning begins in the home as parents listen, speak, read and write with their children. For example parents praise their infants when their initial sounds and noises begin to make sense. In the early stages of oral language, as an infant begins to speak, one word represents a whole thought to them. Massam and Kulik (1990) agree that children recognize that there is a relationship between the spoken and printed word (p. 13), as their parents expose them to environmental print through speaking and reading.

As parents read aloud, children begin to understand the relationship between sounds and words, and see how print works. When a literacy program that includes: phonics, basic sight words, and literature appreciation, begins early, both parent and child receive many benefits. The process of reading aloud to children, as part of their daily routine, reveals that young children gain an understanding of book format, increase their interest in listening and enjoying literature, gain an interest and motivation to read

themselves, and learn how language works.

There are many methods for teaching children how to learn and develop literature skills. The McCracken's (1987) believe that any method can work if the child has prior knowledge that books are about ideas, and knows the melodies of print, the results of someone reading to them (p. 8).

No matter which methodology is emphasized in a Kindergarten program, there are instructional implications for why children benefit from coming to Kindergarten having been read to by parents. Experiences with print according to Gunn, Simmons, and Kameenui (1995) help preschool children:

1. develop an understanding of the conventions, purposes, and functions of print,
2. learn how to attend to language and apply this knowledge to literacy situations by interacting with others who model language functions.
3. gain phonological awareness and letter recognition that contribute to initial reading acquisition by helping children develop efficient word recognition strategies; i.e., detecting pronunciations and storing associations in memory. (p. 7)

An overwhelming body of research proves that children entering Kindergarten without experiences with print and an

understanding of how print works, face an uphill struggle with the acquisition of reading no matter which reading instruction model is used.

Over the years in the author's district, Kindergarten has become a year of acquiring academic skills and not a year of play and learning social skills. Thus the implications of preschool children experiencing reading during parent-child interactions is of vital importance.

The author's school reflects the criteria of an inner city school. Most children come from low, socioeconomic backgrounds with many minority groups. Most of the children qualify for free breakfast and lunch, and many come from single parent homes. When inner city children like these, of differing background knowledge, culture, and language, enter kindergarten without literacy experiences, the teacher must assume the responsibility of providing the instruction they have missed.

This project will give teachers and parents a better understanding of the importance of reading aloud to young children and use the research of noted scholars to validate these beliefs. It will include literacy activities that may be used by parents to expand upon the reading experience. Reading aloud to children is important before they enter school. Pre-school exposure will help

children develop many prereading skills naturally before entering kindergarten. Through early exposure and stimulation to the world of language, parents can enhance their child's inherent learning potential and develop an appreciation of literature that will support them throughout their lives.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Literacy acquisition seems to be a problem for many children and young adults in America today. Literacy learning begins early in the first years of a child's life. Larrick (1975) discovered that, "parents are the major influence in a child's development as a reader" (p. 3). He believes many children come to school without prereading activities: exposure to oral language, the ability to use coherent sentences, and question the meaning of poems, songs, and stories. Some of these children will remain reading cripples through the remainder of their schooling because of this lack of verbal ability.

Current research of Chance (1997) states that if a parent has not read at least three books a day, to their child from birth to age five, the child will be behind in their literacy development as they enter kindergarten (p. 507). Jim Trelease (1981), stated, "If we would get our parents to read to their preschool children 15 minutes a day, we could revolutionize the schools" (p. 11). Parents can be one of the key factors in increasing the reading abilities and desires of their children.

When parents decide to rear children, they begin looking seriously at the child's important physical needs. They provide them

with good food, clothes, and a safe, warm home. As parents work on meeting the physical needs of their children, they need to be cognate of the necessity of nourishing and taking care of their intellectual stimulation. Young children are naturally curious and eager to learn about the world around them. It is important for parents to feed their children's minds with curiosity, and imagination. Many parents talk to their children from the time they are born. In response to this continual oral communication, children gain a control of verbal language skills. They begin asking their parents many questions to learn and understand their world. Children can learn beginning, basic literacy skills from their parents, as the parents read, discuss, and share books. As parents sit down and read with their children, they can share in the knowledge found in literature. Books can be an endless source of knowledge, pleasure, and adventure for both parents and children (Cullinan 1992).

It is important for parents to read aloud to children according to Trelease (1982) "...to awaken their sleeping imaginations and improve their deteriorating language skills" (p. 11). Bernice Cullinan (1992) has found that children who are successful in school and life, have had experiences that enriched their minds. Most of these children have been read to. They have adults in their life who talked with them and asked for their opinions. She believes this is one of

the seeds that helps to grow a reader (p. 3).

Much of the research in the past has focused on the differences between learning to speak and learning to read. Robert and Marlene McCracken (1986) compare the natural metamorphosis of larva to butterfly, to the natural metamorphosis of young children acquiring language acquisition. Both are complex, the butterfly will inevitably turn into a butterfly, however, a child may only become literate with the right environment. Parents can help provide the kind of environment that fosters reading activities. Without help from the home, the metamorphosis of becoming literate can be a tremendous, arduous task (p. ix). Reading aloud provides a natural bridge between oral and written language to help children learn to read.

The literature reviewed concerning the role that parents play in the early literacy development of young children fell into five general categories. First, early experiences prepare children for reading. This involves oral language and other early literacy experiences that prepare children for reading. Second, the reasons why research experts think reading aloud is important. Third, the effects of reading aloud with at risk children. Fourth, the academic literacy benefits of reading aloud to young children, and fifth, the benefits of reading aloud, go beyond academic skills.

Early Experiences Prepare Children for Reading

Oral language is a vital beginning step towards the acquisition of reading. Cullinan said, “ We literally drench children in words as we fill every waking moment with the sounds of our language (p. 8). The report of the California Reading Task force (1995), stated that “Oral language development is important to early literacy” (p. 4). Talking about daily activities and events allows parents to share experiences through language with their children.

The authors of, Becoming a Nation of Readers believe that, “The way in which parents talk to their children about an experience influences what knowledge the children will gain from the experience and their later ability to draw on the knowledge when reading” (p. 22). Parents help young children interpret the world as they orally communicate with them.

Hiebert and Papierz, (1990); Mason and Allen, (1986); McGee and Lomax, (1990); as well as Sulzby and Teale, (1991), studied children’s literacy development before the onset of formal instruction. They defined emergent literacy as a) occurring before children receive formal reading instruction, b) learning about reading, writing and print before schooling, c) acquiring literacy through informal, adult directed activities, and d) helping to acquire specific reading knowledge (p. 1). Emergent literacy activities are

vital to the reading success of children. Cullinan (1992) believes, "you taught your children to talk, to listen, and to understand language...if you do the same things to teach your children to read, they will learn to read and write naturally, too" (p. 7). So much learning can occur naturally as parents communicate and share their world with their children.

Infants enter a world which bombards their senses with a variety of sights, sounds, smells, and feelings. Learning occurs as children begin to use these senses to understand and explore the world around them. Parents help this development as they expose their children to their environment, through reading and verbal conversation. Clay (1991) believes that, "children need to be engaged in conversation about the things they know about because the familiar content provides them with opportunities to experiment with ways of expressing themselves" (p. 37). Experimenting with oral language occurs naturally as children listen to adult role models talk about daily events and common occurrences. As children attempt to speak, their speech comes closer to conventional, recognizable words and ideas. When parents give verbal praise and repeat or model language patterns, children begin developing and using correct, conventional language.

Literacy development, or experience with language, can occur

as parents talk and read to their children. McGee and Lomax (1990) believe that, "developmental literacy learning occurs during the first year of a child's life and is crucial to literacy acquisition" (p. 1). Rob Reiner (1997) states that "experience stimulates a child's brain to grow, and early experience counts the most" (p. 10). As parents talk, sing songs, and read poems and stories to their children, they provide language experiences and model correct expression and articulation. According to Strickland (1990), "positive verbal interaction between parent and child during story reading plays a major role in literacy development" (p. 518).

Language development is vital as children progress into readers. The authors of Becoming a Nation of Readers state that, "Early development of the knowledge required for reading comes from experience, talking and learning about the world and talking and learning about written language" (p. 21). The more parents talk to their children, the more language their children acquire. According to Smith (1985) "Learning to read involves no learning ability that children have not already exercised in order to understand the language spoken at home or to make sense of the visual world around them" (p. 7).

Most parents believe that what their children say is important (Clay, 1991). Through observation and oral

communication, children learn and begin to make sense of their world. When parents share their enthusiasm for learning, by exploring and observing the world with their children, they demonstrate that they value the learning process (Brodkin, 1996). These experiences shared by parent and child enrich their relationship, build trust and understanding, and expose children to many different concepts and ideas they may otherwise never know.

Parents help their children transfer naturally from verbal language to written language when they read aloud. Hiebert (1988), believes the "most successful early readers are children who have had contact at home with written materials" (p. 2). Parents who read aloud with their children, share a variety of reading materials and literacy experiences in the home. This introduces the children to a variety of schematic experiences. It demonstrates a diversity of needs, desires, and purposes for reading. Russell (1984) stated that "a preschooler profits from a parent's oral reading by being exposed to a level of language that he or she will someday adopt" (p. 4-5). As children listen to an adult model the language of books, they increase their awareness and understanding of the relationship between speaking and reading.

The language of books is different than oral language. We talk differently than the language in books and the words we use are

different also. Clay (1991) says that as children “become familiar with the language of books that are read aloud ... [their] attempts at reading become more conventional. Gradually ... [they] begin to produce sentences which replicate those of books” (p. 72). Reading aloud is a natural transition from verbal to written language, and children increase their schematic experiences and understanding of language phrasing. This builds the child’s confidence in literacy learning before formal schooling begins. The acquisition of oral language and reading occur concurrently as parents read aloud to their children. Trelease (1989) believes:

If a child has never heard the word “enormous,” he’ll never say the word. And if he’s neither heard it nor said it, imagine the difficulty when it’s time to read it and write it. Listening comprehension must come before reading comprehension. The listening vocabulary is the reservoir of words that feeds the reading vocabulary pool (p.2).

Emergent literacy learning is the opportunity for parents to help their children use all their senses, to explore and increase the perception of their world. As children learn to talk and are exposed to books, they develop valuable background knowledge that can increase their acquisition of reading literature. Parents can be important facilitators as they talk to their children and expose them

to the language of books.

The Reasons Why Research Experts Think Reading Aloud is Important

Reading aloud to children has received much attention from researchers for many years. According to Sulzby and Teale (1991), “historically, storybook reading has received more research attention than any other aspect of young children’s literacy experiences” (p. 3). One of its primary findings of the report, Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985), indicated that, “The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children” (p. 23). According to Hiebert (1988), “throughout the literature, storybook reading or reading aloud to children emerges as a key component in facilitating early literacy acquisition” (p. 2). This knowledge was further documented by Trelease (1989) when he said, “a large part of the educational research and practice of the last twenty years confirms conclusively that the best way to raise a reader is to read to that child” (p.xiv).

Russel (1991) believes that reading is a habit. If children do not see their parents developing a natural reading habit in the home, they will not develop the reading habit in their life either (p. 14). From the research gathered for this project, there is substantial evidence that reading aloud is one of the most important things

parents can do to increase the early literacy development of their young children.

Many children enter school already able to read. According to Strickland (1990), "research indicates that children who become early readers and who show a natural interest in books are likely to come from homes in which parents, siblings, or other individuals have read to them regularly" (p. 518). Those children who enter school after years of exposure to written material have an advantage over those without this background. Trelease (1989), believes, "they come with larger vocabularies, longer attention spans, greater understanding of books and print, and consequently have the fewest difficulties in learning to read" (p. 4). Hillman explained that "learning to love books, explore the world around them, solve problems, learn about their own capabilities and learn how to get along with peers," is just as important as other "academic" pursuits. (p. 9)

Parents who expose their children to literature early, increase their child's success in reading. In studies on early reading acquisition without formal training, Russell (1984), found that children who learned to read without formal training, did not have higher IQ's, they "were read to by their parents regularly, frequently, and from whatever materials happened to be at hand--

newspapers, road signs, even packing labels" (p. 4). Trelease (1989), further stated that, "regular reading aloud strengthens children's reading, writing, and speaking skills--and thus the entire civilizing process" (p. 2). In fact reading to children may be the single, most powerful contribution parents can make to increase their children's success in school (Russell, 1984). Strickland (1990) believes that as everyone in the family reads to younger children, reading becomes a ritual, a time to look forward to, an opportunity to share quality time together as parent and child or whole family (p. 518).

The results from reading aloud are evident and specific. According to McCormick (1977), "research now provides evidence of the direct relationship between reading aloud to children and reading performance, language development, and the development of reading interests" (p. 143). Mooney stated that, "reading to children widens their horizons and understandings about books, their experiences, and their world" (p. 9). McCormick (1977), noted that "research evidence indicates that reading aloud to children significantly improves their vocabulary knowledge and their reading comprehension...hearing literature read can affect reading interests and the quality of a child's language development" (p. 139).

There are added benefits of reading aloud that may not be noticed in a formal evaluation of reading performance. Mason and

Blanton (1971), say “apparently, exposure to a good story increases one’s desire to read it for himself” (p. 796). Reading aloud to children has been studied thoroughly for years. Although the observations and evaluations focused on different aspects, they all agree that reading aloud can increase the literacy development of children as they enter the world of school.

The Effects of Reading Aloud With At-Risk Children

Literacy development and its importance, varies depending on the culture, communication patterns, and practices of the society. In some countries, the reason for learning how to read, is to read the Bible. In other countries, children learn to read to learn cultural values. Some countries value oral over written language. The perception of the parents role in their children’s literacy development, varies within cultures as well” (Gunn, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1996). Van Kleeck (1990), found five factors that seem to contribute to reading achievement: academic guidance, attitude toward education, parental aspirations for the child, conversations and reading materials in the home, and cultural activities. These factors are influenced by the emphasis and importance that is placed on literature activities in the home. He found that the socioeconomic status of the family does not seem to directly affect reading achievement (p. 6-7).

When a child enters the family, parents have a responsibility to take care of that child. McCormick (1977) believes, "few parents neglect the physical needs of their preschool children, but many fail to find time to provide the intellectually stimulating activity of reading to them" (p. 143). Those children entering school with few literary experiences and little exposure to books and reading, according to Mason's (1986) research, "had much to learn about print and were easily confused if they could not map words onto their oral language or could not recognize or distinguish letters" (p. 25).

Jim Trelease (1989) compared the achievement of a professional baseball star's son making his own way to the major leagues, with that of a child, who becomes a reader because of a parent role model. The baseball star played ball with his son, modeling the way to be a successful player. Similarly, a child whose parent shared books with them, modeled successful reading patterns and habits for the child to follow (p. xxiv). Storybook reading is so important that Morrow believes those children without it, may miss a key part of the initial foundation of reading development (p.) which include concepts of print, patterns and rhythms of language, and the enjoyment of literature.

McCormick (1977), reviewed the literature and studies of reading aloud to children, on a regular basis, and found that

economically disadvantaged children benefited greatly. She perceived that disadvantaged children gained more vocabulary, because they were introduced to standard English patterns they may not use everyday. They showed a significant increase in vocabulary, word meanings, visual decoding, motor encoding, and reading comprehension achievement. Those children who have not been exposed to literature before entering school seemed to receive a greater benefit from being read to than other children (p. 139-140).

The Academic Literacy Benefits of Reading Aloud to Young Children

Reading aloud to children provides many benefits. Some seem to focus on increased academic success, while others focus on the entertainment and enjoyment value of reading aloud. McLane (1990) said, "parents and other family members and friends influence the development of literacy by serving as models of literate behavior" (p. 90). Through reading aloud, parents naturally teach their young children the concepts of print such as: how to hold a book, how to turn the pages, how to read left to right and top to bottom, and understand the relationship between the text and the pictures. The children also have practice hearing and expressing thoughts in a fluent, efficient way (Larrick, 1975).

Button (1996) mentions six academic values of reading aloud to children: motivating them to read, providing an adult model,

develop a sense of story, develop knowledge of written language, syntax, and how writing is structured, increase vocabulary and language usage, and allows parent and child to experience and share a literature experience (p. 448).

As parents read books to their children, they give them an opportunity to see communication through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Peterson (1990) said, "the sharing of literature aloud anchors the sounds of the language of literature in the minds of ...[children]" (p. 9). According to Meek, "when ...[children] sit on an adult's knee to listen to a story from a book, they discover that books have their own language, the language of writing" (p. 16).

Parents model the joy of literature as they read with their children. Children hear the beauty of language and will desire to want to read on their own (McCormick, 1977). Trelease (1984) agrees that if parents introduce their children to books they will, "be motivated to read, and if they did it early enough, it's very probable they wouldn't be in remedial reading classes at all" (p. 13). Going along with Trelease, Hiebert (1988) believes that when children are read to, they learn the concepts and functions of the written language in books (p. 6).

Sharing literature together creates a common family

experience. Young children who are read to from an early age, have someone to share and enjoy stories with them. They can receive answers to their questions about words or meanings of stories from a caring adult (Clay, 1991, p. 40). McCormick (1977) thinks that, "younger children may benefit from being read to more than older children. Possibly...the younger the pupil, the more the effect of reading aloud bears upon the child's needs in reading" (p. 140). When parents begin reading aloud to their children early, the importance of literacy becomes a natural part of the child's life.

The authors of Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985) believe, "There is no substitute for a ...[parent] who reads children good stories. It whets the appetite of children for reading, and provides a model of skillful oral reading" (p. 51). When parents read aloud, they have the opportunity to expose their children to different genres and styles of writing (Peterson, 1990). Along with the educational benefits, when parents read to young children, Trelease (1984) believes their "imagination is stimulated, attention span stretched, listening comprehension improved,... [and] emotional development nurtured" (p. 17).

The Benefits of Reading Aloud go Beyond Academic Skills

When parents read aloud to their young children, the benefits seem to go far beyond academic skills. Children have a longer

attention span, increase their background knowledge, and share quality time with another adult as they share the joys of literature together. Trelease states "literature brings us closest to the human heart" (p. 13).

As parents spend time sharing literature with their children, they also enjoy the affection and togetherness that are developed while reading together (Russell, 1984, p. 5). Parents and children can laugh, cry, be afraid, and experience many other emotions, as they read together (Trelease, 1984, p. xxx). The time parents share reading aloud with their young children can be the beginning of a lifetime of mutual experiences and discoveries.

Cullinan (1992), makes an analogy between reading aloud to children and fuzzy socks. He believes, "the wider and richer the fields of experience we bring them through, the more ideas and skills will stick to them and eventually grow" (p. 2). Their minds have been enriched through these reading experiences and they have a reservoir of knowledge to draw upon to help them understand new situations and ideas.

Trelease (1989) stated, "Plant the joy of reading in that ...[child] today and there's a good chance he'll do likewise with his children twenty years down the road" (p. xxiv). With all this evidence that reading aloud is important, it is frustrating to see so

many children entering school without this enriching experience. D. Russell (1991) thinks that "perhaps the principal responsibility of adults . . . is simply to make sure that children and books come together - often - and that, when they do, the experience is a pleasurable and stimulating one" (p. 14). Peterson (1990) states, "as the number of books read increases both ...[parent] and ...[child] will become outfitted with a rich shared history to draw upon" (p. 10).

When parents talk to their children and share books, they help their children naturally learn to enjoy reading literature. Larrick (1975) believes, "Few activities create a warmer relationship between child and grownup than reading aloud" (p. 29). The report Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985) states that, "a parent is a child's one enduring source of faith that somehow, sooner or later, he or she will become a good reader" (p. 28).

Parents reflect their values, ideas, and feelings of the world, life, and family relationships to their children. This relationship between parent and child is extremely important. Therefore, the literature shared in the family according to D. Russell (1991) "can be one of the most fulfilling of human experiences" (p. 15).

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project is to develop a few brochures to encourage parents to read aloud to their young children. The goal of this project is to provide teachers and parents with a collection of brochures containing specific information and activities about reading, writing, listening, and speaking with their young children. These brochures should help to enhance and strengthen the early childhood program in a school, and increase the school readiness of young children entering kindergarten.

America has an increasing number of children entering school unprepared for formal reading activities. The desire to read comes naturally as children are read to, sung to, and exposed to reading and writing in their environment. Many parents are unsure how to share language experiences with their children. As teachers share these ideas with parents, they can encourage parents to spend some time helping their young children become more aware of reading and writing in a natural way.

A portion of these brochures are developed for teachers. They give teachers general background information and activities that tell why reading aloud is important. Others give them a few specific behavioral observations, activities, and suggestions that teachers can use as they work with young children and their parents. The

remaining brochures have practical ideas and activities specifically designed for parents interested in helping their young children.

These activities will help to give young children natural experiences with language.

The teacher brochures are designed to help teachers understand why it is important to share books with young children and the importance of reading aloud to help children succeed in school. They will also provide a variety of ways for teachers to encourage parents to share books with their young children. The brochures can also help parents see how important and easy it is to naturally, build a desire to read in their young children, by reading aloud with them. Teachers can give the activity brochures to parents when they are conferencing or meeting with parents, or when parents have questions about activities they can do with their young children.

This project has been designed to give teachers background knowledge of why reading aloud is important for the reading success of young children. It will give parents simple step by step activities to do with their children. It is hoped that it would also encourage both parents and teachers to read aloud often with young children.

LIMITATIONS

Reading aloud to children can be important and beneficial at any age, however, this project is targeted for young children from ages two to six. Many children this age are beginning to develop prereading skills, therefore, these activities are not as appropriate for older readers.

The distribution of these brochures is easier done at the beginning of kindergarten or during parent teacher conferences, however this is almost too late to be effective. This information would be better used with young children before they enter school. Parents should have access to these materials when their children are very young, but it may be difficult to inform parents before their children enter school. It is often more difficult to encourage the parents who would benefit the most, because they are less likely to come in contact with libraries or preschools which could also distribute this information.

After the brochures are distributed, it is difficult to know whether parents are utilizing the ideas. The effectiveness of the brochures will be unknown. These brochures are just the beginning ideas to help parents get started. Parents will need to go beyond, adjust the ideas, and think of their own activities that seem appropriate for the personality and interests of their own children.

Since the brochures were designed for parents, there are only a few ideas for teachers. These ideas for teachers could have been more extensive if that were my goal.

These brochures are designed to be used one at a time when parents ask questions or show a specific concern. The number of activities included in this project are just the beginning, there are many other activities that could help young children learn to read, write, listen, and speak in a natural way. Parents will need to expand and extend these activities.

APPENDIX

Early Reading Activities to Prepare for School Success

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TEACHER BROCHURES

Research on Reading Aloud for Teachers

Just about every American child goes to kindergarten. This is the first step in their formal education. The kindergarten experience varies depending on the academic or developmental emphasis of the school, and the background knowledge of the child. Researchers have found that the most important activity parents can do to increase their child's success in school is sharing literature together, or read aloud to children from an early age. For decades research has indicated that the family has a powerful impact on the education of its children. William Russell (1986) believes that,

reading aloud is the cornerstone of family learning and family learning may very well be our best hope for revitalizing public education in America.... What the research shows is that it is not what a family is or what a family has that affects...the academic achievement of its children; the differences can be traced, instead, to what a family does to encourage learning in the home. (p. 1)

In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in technology and a growing number of jobs in the world that require more education, knowledge, and abilities than in the past. With this increased need for advanced education, there is an increasing need

for children to enter school ready to learn. In 1992, the National Governors' Association was concerned with early childhood learning when they created six educational goals. The first one stated that by the year 2000, all children in America would enter school ready to learn. This preparation needs to include background experiences that give children skills and abilities to prepare them for academic success.

So, what can parents do to help their children be ready to enter school and be successful? They can read aloud to their children. Many believe that reading success is based on the experiences a child has with literature in the home during the preschool years and the first few years of school. Without developing wholesome attitudes toward reading in these formative years, a child has much less desire to become a reading adult (Coody, 1992). As a child sees their parents reading stories and sharing them with others, the child will gain a desire to read on their own, just like their parents.

Parents teach their children through their example. In the report Becoming a Nation of Readers, Anderson (1985) stated, "The more knowledge children are able to acquire at home, the greater their chance for success in reading" (p. 22). Children learn about themselves and about their parents through their daily interactions. When parents listen attentively to what their children say, children

learn that their parents consider their ideas and language to be interesting and informative. When parents surround their children with books and print, they learn the value of becoming literate. When parents spend time reading a book, magazine, newspaper, or cookbook, children learn that reading is important, helpful, and fun. Sharing literature gives children events, adventures, language, and memories they may not be able to experience in any other way.

Carla Nelson (1996) studied individual families and found that what the family does is more important to student success than family income or education. This is true, whether the family is rich or poor, whether the parents finished high school or not, or whether the child is in preschool or in the upper grades. In other words, it is possible for any parent to help their child be successful in school, and one of the most important keys to reading success is reading aloud.

At an early age, young children can recognize the importance and need for reading as their parents show an interest in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to McLane (1990) "Parents and other family members and friends influence the development of literacy by serving as models of literate behavior" (p. 90). Children who see family members reading, writing, and using oral language effectively, will be motivated to learn to read for themselves.

Why it is Important for Parents to Read Aloud to Their Young Children?

Over and over again researchers state that the most important activity parents can do to prepare their children for school, is to read aloud to and with them. In the report Becoming a Nation of Readers, Anderson (1985) stated, "A parent is a child's one enduring source of faith that somehow, sooner or later, he or she will become a good reader" (p. 28). Young children spend much of their time observing their parents to help them understand the world around them. They pay close attention and notice the activities that occupy their parents time. If they see their parents engaging in literature related activities such as writing, listening, speaking and reading, they will desire to do those things also. Peterson (1990) believes, "The sharing of literature aloud anchors the sounds of the language of literature in the minds of [children]" (p. 9). The more exposure to stories and language children experience, the broader their understanding of life will be.

Exposing children to many diverse language activities and experiences, increases their background knowledge, curiosity, and interest in knowing about the world. Cullinan (1992) compared the young impressionable mind of a young child to a pair of fuzzy socks. He stated, "The wider and richer the fields of experience we bring

them through, the more ideas and skills will stick to them and eventually grow” (p. 2). Children can use these experiences to draw on when they read literature, and share it with others.

The most important activity to build the knowledge required for success in reading, is reading aloud. Carla Nelson (1996) believes that parents are the most influential teachers in their child’s education. Children form their ideas about learning and reading from their parents’ examples. As children see their parents reading, they are likely to gain the desire to become readers themselves. Parents who read aloud to their children, expose them to the world, with its diverse people, places, cultures, and more. The more children experience, learn, and know about the world, the more background experiences they have to draw on when reading and writing on their own.

Trelease (1989) said, “Plant the joy of reading in [children] today and there’s a good chance [they will] do likewise with [their] children twenty years down the road” (p. xxiv). As a young child, I had a very hard time learning to read in elementary school. My parents believed that reading was important, so we read aloud together as a family at bedtime, at the dinner table, and in the car. We read anything and everything. I learned to read because my parents read to me and showed me how reading and language work.

What Does a Literate Child Look Like to a Teacher of Young Children?

Young children who have been exposed to many books, experience a variety of characters and settings and become familiar with different forms and uses of their language. These children are better prepared for the reading experiences they will encounter in school. When they enter school, they are ready to learn. Children who have background experiences to draw on, are more prepared for the reading experience. They are better prepared to understand the way language works and how to use a book.

Educational researchers in New Zealand believe, (Ministry of Education, 1994) "When [children] sit on an adult's knee to listen to a story from a book, they discover that books have their own language, the language of writing" (p. 16). Oral language is different than the language of books. Those children who have been exposed to book language will be more attentive and eager to listen to literature when they enter school.

There is a distinct difference in the behavior of children who enter school with a rich language background and those who don't. The Ministry of Education (1994) stated, children who are ready for school, "are those who have been played with, sung to, read to, talked with, listened to, with fun, care and patience. The good readers are those who have found books and print as much a part of

life as kisses and cuddles” (p. 19).

Children who enjoy listening to stories, poems, and music before entering school are better prepared for reading activities. They have a better understanding of how print works. For example, they know the correct way to open a book, that the print on the page has meaning, and that you read from left to right. These children also have an increased attention span for language activities. They use background knowledge gained from early reading experiences to make connections to new stories. These connections help develop higher level thinking skills through questions and discussions.

Children who are introduced to language through books, usually develop strong verbal skills and can express their ideas orally to others so that communication is achieved. These children can better put their feelings into words. Their attention span is developing so that they want to listen to new things, and are eager to share and express their ideas with you.

Natural Reading Activities for Teachers of Young Children to Share With Parents

The world is full of sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings. Parents can expose their young children to the world, by talking, reading, and writing about what they are doing and how they are feeling. The McCracken's (1987) believe that, "Children learn to talk as a natural result of experiencing oral language . . . speaking and listening develop naturally from this immersion in a world [where] speech is the central organizer of perceptions and method of communication" (p. 1).

The McCracken's (1986) believe a young child sees the world as a visual confusion of people, actions, things, print, oral language, and noise. Young children are bombarded with print early through labels, signs, cereal boxes, pop cans, and ads on T.V. This is often referred to as environmental print because it is print found in their environment. Newspapers, books, magazines, computer programs, and letter or note writing are other forms of writing commonly seen by children. They can easily recognize and respond to this print. They soon become aware that print represents things and ideas in the same way that speech represents things and ideas. Young children can respond as naturally to print as they do to speech (p. 2).

Here are some reading tips you can share with parents to

interest their young children in reading:

1. Make books a staple in your home. When children see parents reading regularly, they usually want to read, too.

2. Read a bedtime story. Children enjoy hearing a variety of stories anytime. Bedtime is a nice time to read with a child. It can calm them down from the activities of the day and often becomes the favorite time of the day for both parent and child. Children will often ask for the same story to be read over and over again. This is a good thing and the repetitive experience often teaches reading skills.

3. Make reading a fun part of your family vacations. Books are fun on long car rides and are great entertainment wherever you go. Choose stories that are interesting to your children. This will make the trip seem quicker, make memories, and introduce the children to new adventures. You can read stories as well as maps, travel brochures, and signs on the road.

4. Read around the dinner table. "Here's an idea that can strengthen your family. Tonight at the dinner table, read something outloud to you family. Tomorrow night, let another member read something: a news story, a Bible verse, a Robert Frost poem, a cereal box panel, history, humor, anything. Each night, a different family member can read a selection. Imagine

the wide range of subjects your family will read in 365 days.

What a stimulating way to have your children develop good reading habits.

We have twenty-three million illiterate adults in America. We wouldn't have one if each of them had been served reading as part of their nightly diet. It's non-fattening, but enriching, and it doesn't cost a dime" From the Wall Street Journal.

5. Expose children to environmental Print. Signs, articles, and labels give important messages to people. They keep you healthy, protect you from danger, give you directions for food, shelter, safety, and fun, and so forth. As parents help children become aware of environmental print, the children will see the role that print plays in the community. This awareness will increase the importance of print to the child and increase their desire to understand it.

Smith (1985) stated, "Anything in the world of print surrounding children can be read to them with profit (p. 122). Our environment is saturated with print. Everywhere we look we see print on store fronts, street signs, newspapers, and advertisements. Helping young children recognize the environmental print around them will prepare them naturally for recognizing the print they see in books.

Your home is also filled with words and letters that can be brought to the attention of your child. This provides an excellent opportunity for young children to become aware of letters, letter-sounds, and words in a natural environment that will enhance their eagerness to learn. There are many simple ideas in the end of this booklet to work with environmental print.

6. Lap Reading. Reading to young children is a very good way to expose them to print. The parent places the child on their lap, holding the book in front of the child so that the print and pictures are in full view. This should be an enjoyable interaction between the parent and the child. Eight months old is not too young to be introduced to age-appropriate books. As the child grows older, run your finger from left to right under the print as you read. This will help your child begin to understand how print is used, and that print has meaning.

7. Oral language experiences. The language in books is different than spoken communication. Children need to hear both. D. Russell (1991) believes, "sharing literature with children orally can be one of the most fulfilling of human experiences" (p. 15). Talking with young children about anything and everything will increase their awareness of the world, their background knowledge, their views and opinions of the way things are, and their speaking

vocabulary. Sharing literature together gives parent and child opportunities to talk about subjects and things that may or may not be common in their everyday life.

Mooney (1990) believes that, "Reading a variety of labels, poems, recipes, diaries, letters, stories, articles, and rhymes ... show children how reading goes well beyond any lesson or school day" (p. 24). Read nursery rhymes and your child will hear and learn the rhythm and rhyme of language. Sing songs aloud and the tune increases the ease of remembering the words. Retell well-known stories to children and help them hear the pattern and sequence of stories. Discuss videos or storytelling. Children form their opinions and ideas about things from their parents reactions. Talk about places you visit together and what makes those places interesting, or important.

Families can go to movies, plays, or performances and share their thoughts and ideas with one another. As they share these events together, the parents help their children form opinions about which pieces are good or bad, and why. Through these discussions, children may increase their vocabulary and oral language, formulate their views and insights of the behavior of others, and experience stories they would not otherwise see.

8. Alphabet games. There are many ideas to strengthen alphabet recognition. You can play the alphabet game in the car. You start with the letter "a" and find a sign or billboard with a word beginning with that letter. When you found it, you go to the next letter, and so on. With young children, this will help them become aware of letters and words in the environment.

18 Reading Aloud Suggestions for Teachers to Share with Parents

1. Begin reading to children as soon as possible.
2. Use Mother Goose rhymes and songs to stimulate an infant's language and listening.
3. Boldly colored picture books, arouse children's curiosity and visual sense.
4. Read as often as you and your child have time for.
5. Set aside at least one traditional time each day for a story.
6. Remember to read slowly.
7. Before you begin to read, announce the name of the book and the author and illustrator
8. The first time you read a book, discuss the illustration on the cover. "What do you think this is going to be about?"
9. As you read, keep children involved by occasionally asking, "What do you think is going to happen next?"
10. Leave time to listen to the child's comments and talk about the book, but don't demand interpretations or quiz the child.
11. Occasionally read above children's intellectual level and challenge their minds.
12. Use plenty of expression when reading. If possible, change your tone of voice to fit the dialogue.
13. Lead by example. Make sure your children see you reading for pleasure other than at read-aloud time.
14. Provide them with books of their own.

15. Choose books you both enjoy.
16. Set an example by reading books, magazines, newspapers, food packages, etc...
17. Have books and reading materials available in the kitchen, the living room, the bathroom, etc...
18. Share with them your enthusiasm for whatever you are reading.

Pre-Reading Preparation Rubric for Teachers of Young Children

Here is a checklist to help you determine a child's reading preparation and readiness. Circle the answer that most closely corresponds to the child's behavior.

1. Do they have a long attention span for reading books?
 - a. They can they sit still and listen to a story.
 - b. They sit still for one or two pages.
 - c. They are easily distracted from a story.
2. Are they curious?
 - a. They explore, ask questions with how and why, are interested in everything you are doing, and eager to try new things.
 - b. They try a few new things, begin questioning what they see, and hear.
 - c. They do not explore or go out of their comfort zone, they do not question things.
3. Do they have background knowledge?
 - a. They have experienced the zoo, museums, and special places.
 - b. They visit the library once a week.
 - c. They draw and paint pictures of an experience and talk about it
 - d. They play in a group of friends and interact and talk with friends.
 - e. They go to puppet show and plays.

Children who have had many of these kinds of experiences will have ideas, that will help them be prepared for language experiences as they enter school.

4. Do they have higher level thinking skills?
 - a. They can think of many creative ways to solve a problem.
They ask broad, specific, meaningful questions.
Their questions spark their imagination to other questions.
 - b. They start to look at problems, and answer questions in many different ways.
They ask simple general questions.
 - c. They have difficulty forming ideas and questions.
They have difficulty knowing what to ask.
5. Can they express their ideas orally?
 - a. They talk in complete sentences and say a clear thought.
 - b. They begin to use simple sentences
 - c. They use body language, words, or phrases to communicate a complete thought.

(adapted from Ministry of Education. (1985). Reading in junior classes. Katonah, NY: Richard C. Owen Publishers Inc.)

Concepts of Print Check List for Teachers

These are prereading concepts of print that will help young children become familiar with and better understand how reading works. These concepts can be learned naturally by reading aloud and sharing a book with your child. Can they do the following?

- ___ Show you the front of a book?
- ___ Show you the back of a book?
- ___ Point to the title?
- ___ Show where to start reading?
- ___ Show where it tells the story (print not picture)?
- ___ Show which way we go when we are reading?
(from left to right)
- ___ Show where we go when we get to the end of a line
(go back to the left)?
- ___ Listen or read and point to the text, is there an exact
match between number of words spoken and number
of words printed?
- ___ Put their fingers around a word?
- ___ Find two words that are the same?
- ___ Show you the first word on a page?
- ___ Show you the last word on a page?
- ___ Identify a letter?
- ___ Identify a word?
- ___ Tell you the names of some letters on a page?
- ___ Find a capital letter?
- ___ Find a small (lower case) letter?

(adapted from S. B. C. U. S. D. Kindergarten assess, San Bern., CA)

PARENT BROCHURES

Six Steps in Reading a Book

1. Find a book that looks interesting to both the parent and the child.
2. Sit so both parent and child can see the words and pictures in the book.
3. Read slowly and clearly so the child can understand.
4. Half way through the book, ask the child what they think will happen next.
5. Talk together about what you liked and didn't like about the book.
6. Have the child retell the story.

Reading in the Car

1. Look at the street signs and identify the first letter.
2. Identify letters and numbers on the license plate of the car in front of you
3. Find the numbers on houses and count to that number. (count to the first or last number, not to the hundreds)
4. Find a given letter on a billboard, sign, or store.
5. Pick a letter of the day and see how many times you can see that letter as you are driving.

Activities in the Grocery Store

1. Talk about the colors of the vegetables and fruits.
2. Talk about the different shapes of boxes and containers. (square, rectangle, circle, round, etc.)
3. Talk about the different sizes of containers. (small, large, big, little, smaller, tallest, etc.)
4. Talk about the first letter on the labels of the items you are buying. ("I" for ice cream, "J" for Jello, "B" for bread, etc.)
5. Talk about the difference between numbers and letters. (Find the price, or find the number one, find how many popsicles are in this box)

Math Activities in Your Backyard

1. How many steps from the back door to the end of the patio, the swing set, the fence, etc.
2. What shapes do you see standing in the backyard? (rectangle house, triangle roof, circle wheels on bike, etc.)
3. How many windows, doors, or squares do you see?
4. How many yellow things do you see? Pick another color and ask the same question.

Fast Food Activities

1. Say the first letter sound of the item they want to eat. ("h" hamburger, "c" coke, "f" french fries, etc.)
2. Count how many kinds of drinks are available. (counting the words)
3. Find how many places they can see the restaurant name. (McDonald's on the door, napkin, straw, etc. finding two words that are the same)
4. Count the french fries (count one by one, put them in groups of two, or five, or ten)
5. Name the foods they are eating, name the colors, and describe them.

How to Help My Child Have Good Language

1. Describe what they are wearing using complete sentences. Then, have them describe as much as they can.
2. Retell your favorite part of the day in a complete sentence. Ask your child to retell their favorite part of the day and why they liked it.
3. Tell your child the steps for making a sandwich, cooking vegetables, or pouring milk.
4. Read a book and talk about it with your child.

Relating an Experience Orally

1. Use complete sentences.
2. Tell the beginning, middle, and end. What happened first, second, and last.
3. Describe the setting: was it inside or outside, was it day or night, was it summer or winter?
4. Summarize what happened. Include who, what where, why, and how.
5. Tell what you thought about it.

Extended Ideas from Sesame Street

1. Use the letter of the day to help your child find objects, toys, furniture in your house that begin with the same letter.
2. Focus on the shape of the day. Count how many things in your kitchen, bedroom, etc. are square, triangle, circle, and rectangle.
3. Focus on the color of the day and play "I spy with my little eye something that is red". Have your child guess what you are thinking about.
4. Ask them to repeat one of the poems or nursery rhymes they heard on Sesame Street that day.

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